

**Carrying the News of Lee's Surrender
To the Army of the Ohio.**



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—> To the Army of the Ohio.

A Paper

READ BEFORE THE

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—BY—

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The month of April, 1865, was momentous in its events relating to the War of the Rebellion. The veteran armies of the West and East were marshaling in Virginia and North Carolina for the last great struggle. The Army of the Ohio, transported from the field of its recent victories in Tennessee, had assisted in opening the ports of the Atlantic, so that supplies could be accumulated at such points as Sherman might find it necessary to touch, in his march from Savannah through the Carolinas. Having secured Wilmington and moved up the coast to Goldsboro, where food and clothing and munitions of war were sent from Newberne, we heard the thunders of Sherman's guns at Bentonville, and, marching toward the sound of the artillery, effected a junction with the lost army and restored its communications with the armies in Virginia and with the National Capital. In quick succession great events were transpiring, and associated with them was an incident with which I was conspicuously connected. Its character is such that I will be pardoned, I am sure, if I use it to-night to entertain you for a few moments and enable you to recall with me those stirring scenes connected with the close of our army life.

On a bright day in April, 1865, Major-General J. D.

Cox, commanding the Twenty-third Army Corps, with his staff and escort, were riding leisurely at the head of the marching column on the road to the capital of North Carolina. The latest news we had had from Grant was of the fierce struggles about Richmond, its evacuation, and Lee's flight toward Central Virginia. We were pushing on toward Raleigh to prevent a consolidation of Johnston's and Lee's armies; and though hourly expecting news of important movements, we had no expectation of decisive victory. As I was riding by the General's side, speculating with him as to Johnston's probable movements, an orderly rode slowly toward us, bearing a message. General Cox opened it in the usual business-like manner, and read it over as he would have done an ordinary official communication. There was nothing in the manner of the messenger to indicate that he was the bearer of any unusual or important news, and he sat listlessly on his horse while a receipt was being written for the message. Happening then to cast my eyes toward the General, I noticed his face suddenly brighten, and in great animation he turned and directed the escort and staff to be drawn up in line, that he might read to them a message from General Sherman. It was done in a hurry, and with head uncovered he read a brief dispatch stating that General Lee, with his entire army, had surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. It was the message long looked for, long fought for, and though it came to us on the roadside so unexpectedly, its full significance was at once appreciated. It meant home, and wife, and children, and happy meetings, throughout the land. The cheers that rang through that North Carolina pine thicket from the headquarters' staff and escort of a battalion of cavalry were

spirited enough to fill the whole dome of the heavens above us. Before the message was read General Cox ordered all hats off and throats cleared for three rousing cheers. Our horses' reins were loosened and thrown on their necks, and hats were off as fast as ready hands could catch them. As the cheers rang out, prompt and sharp, my horse, becoming frightened, whirled quick as a flash, and before I could gather my bridle reins to check him, was at full speed, headed toward the approaching column. I had hardly slackened his rapid strides, when the thought flashed upon me that it would be a glorious thing to carry such news to the twenty thousand men of the Twenty-third Army Corps, who were marching on the broad road before me, all unconscious of the glad tidings that awaited them. It needed no second thought. If any additional incentive had been needed, I had it in the clatter of horses' hoofs behind me. Accompanying the corps on the day's march were two correspondents—one of the New York *Tribune* and one of the Cincinnati *Gazette*. They noticed the rapid dash of my horse toward the marching troops, and with the quick instinct common to men in their calling, guessed that it was my purpose to carry the news to the brave men of the Army of the Ohio. Thinking, perhaps, that it was an unwarranted intrusion in their line of business, they both put spurs to their horses to overtake me and make the ride famous as the achievement of the special correspondent of the *Tribune* or the *Gazette*, whichever should first secure the right of way. But my horse was too fleet for them. Spurring and giving free reins to the excited animal, he flew over the ground like a greyhound, seeming to know that a ride of unusual significance was before

him. Soon I came in sight of the head of the column, Major-General Couch and staff leading the Second Division. They had heard our cheers, and as they saw me coming down the road at full speed, with hat off, waving for a clear road by which to pass to the rear, they parted ranks to the right and left, and opened a clear passage in the center of the highway. As soon as I was within shouting distance, I cried out: "Lee, with his whole army, has surrendered to Grant. Make way for the bearer of the glorious news!" Then their wild cheers rang out to swell those of the staff and the headquarters' escort, which could still be heard at my rear. But a few rods back of General Couch and his staff was the head of the infantry column—the 111th Ohio Regiment. The men saw how the right of way had been quickly given to the horse and rider by General Couch and his escort in front of them, and as I waved to them to open ranks and give me the roadway, they responded with a will, and, breaking to the right and left, gave me a straight, open road to the rear. Into this living lane, skirted with lines of anxious faces, I dashed with a quick gallop, leaving my pursuers behind, surrounded by the confused ranks of a wild army, to whom their pleas for right of way were of such utter insignificance as not to even secure them notice. The last I saw of my newspaper friends they had taken to the fields and were trying to get in advance of me in that way ; but fences and woods impeded them, and at last, in despair, they stopped to see me forging ahead, followed by the plaudits and tears of a grateful soldiery. At the head of each regiment, with horse at full speed, and as often as I could repeat it to the anxious listeners, I cried out, with the waving of my hat, "Lee has sur-

rendered, with his whole army, to Grant." Onward I pressed my way through the surging ranks—before me the open road, lined on each side with excited men leaning forward to catch the first sound of the good news they were all so impatient to hear—behind me, a wild, tumultuous crowd of soldiers suddenly touched with the lunacy of joy, if they were to be judged by their actions, pounding each other with knapsacks, waving blankets on the points of their bayonets, pounding canteens with belt buckles, and making a pandemonium of sounds and a circus of tumbling and vaulting. It was news that needed no explanation. It carried indescribable joy and relief to those brave men upon whom the long suspense of weary marches and indecisive battles were fast taxing patience and exhausting strength. It meant a speedy end of marching under a hot Southern sun with heavy knapsacks, and a happy reunion at home. It meant but few more, if any, bloody battles, with the chances of war leaving them crippled or dead upon the field, and the wild plaudits of a grateful people released from the throes of war. It meant good-bye to tent and camp, and the wild exultation of the homeward march through streets filled with joyous friends, and under banners flaunting from every house-top and window in the dear old home town, from whence messages of love and prayers for safe return had followed them from the first day of enlistment. It meant but few more nights on picket duty, but a final happy reunion around the old hearth-stone, where home and all its blessings awaited them. This was the meaning of those brief words that I cried out with such wild excitement to 20,000 men; and for eight long miles, through ranks of infantry regiments,

through batteries of artillery, by the ambulance and hospital trains, rode the one man to whom every ear was turned—the one bearer of tidings whose voice filled every heart with joy and gratitude. And do you wonder, companions, when I say to you to-night, that I look back upon that incident as the happiest and most eventful one of my army life? I wish I had the gift to tell you of all its striking points, of how differently strong men gave expression to their joys. Some were too much overcome to speak; some shouted themselves hoarse, while others cried; some were wild with their demonstrations, while others were calm and thoughtful, and secretly breathed a prayer for their safe deliverance from the long series of dangers to which they had been exposed.

The scenes, so long as my ride carried me through divisions and brigades of marching men, strong in step and toughened by the exposures of years of active service, were altogether inspiring and joyous, unalloyed with any misgivings of fears for their ultimate and speedy reunion with loved ones at home. But when I came to the hospital train, moving slowly and guardedly along, quite a different scene awaited me. The poor men who filled the ambulances, watching impatiently for the bearer of the news to reach them, wearily leaned their heads out of the curtained sides to catch the earliest glimpse of the approaching messenger. As I reached them I slackened my pace and repeated my message to the occupants of each ambulance. Their pale faces beamed with joy, and slowly, but with all the energy and strength they could summon, they waved their thin hands and tried to join in the shouts and the demonstrations of their hardier and more fortunate

comrades. The news was too late for some of them, too plainly the mark of death was upon them; and sad indeed it was to think, that just as the whole nation was delirious with joy over the long-looked for Angel of Peace, the shadow (not the light) of its spreading wings was to fall upon their last hours. To die almost within sight of home, and almost within hearing of the welcome greetings of loved ones, was a sadder fate than to have gone down amid the storm and fury of the battle-field.

Passing on from this sad part of my ride, I witnessed scenes of a more livening nature.

At the top of a hill, as I neared the end of my long ride, I saw a general, well known to all regiments in the Army of the Ohio, anxiously looking for the bearer of the good news; for long before I could be seen, the men could hear the wild cheering from the head of the column gradually growing louder and nearer, and therefore knew that news of unusual importance was coming by the hands of some bearer. As I came within hailing distance he recognized me, and cried out: "Ricks, what is it—for God's sake, what is it?" I had grown so hoarse from constant repetition of the message in the midst of such great noise and confusion that I could scarcely speak aloud; but when near enough, I again repeated: "Lee has surrendered with his whole army to Grant." Quick as a flash, and with the agility of a boy, he clapped his heels together, and with a wild yell turned a complete somersault in the road and ran back to his command—a part of the Third Division—which had just drawn off from the road for dinner. The assembly was immediately sounded, and beginning with the field officers and the band of the first regiment, and followed by the line officers and color bearers, we

marched down the front of the regiment, and so along the front of each succeeding regiment of the division, the bands playing and colors waving, the triumphal procession being greeted by the men of each regiment in line with cheers and salutes suitable to the occasion. Before we reached the last regiment we had a royal procession of officers, and bands, and color bearers that in itself was an extraordinary spectacle.

The quick wit of the soldier is proverbial, but I never heard a more striking proof of it than on the occasion I am describing. In one of the regiments, as I was sweeping through the ranks, I caught the bright face of a soldier leaning out beyond the lines as far as possible to catch the first sound from my lips. "What is it, what is it?" he anxiously shouted. "Lee has surrendered with his whole army to Grant," was the reply. Clear and loud, above all the voices, and quick as the message fell upon his waiting ears, was his answer: "Great God! You're the man I've been looking for, for the last four years." What a world of meaning there was in that prompt answer! True enough, that was the news a whole nation of wearied people were waiting for—that was the message the whole army had been looking for through long campaigns of hard marches and desperate battles; but it took the quick wit of a bright soldier to express it tersely and aptly. Near the rear of the corps I found the 104th Regiment, O. V. I., of which I was a member. Some children living near by, attracted by the novel sight of men suddenly springing to their feet, jumping on knapsacks, battering canteens against each others' muskets, throwing hats in the air and playing foot-ball with haversacks, jumping at leap-frog and frantically embracing each other, had run

over to watch the strange antics and find out what it all meant. Their mothers, in great distress, went after them, as much perhaps to hear the news as to rescue their children from the "Yankee" soldiers. When they heard the cause of all the excitement, they were as much overcome as the "Yankees" themselves; and one of them, with her long hair streaming in the wind, knelt down in the road, and clasping her children, thanked God again and again that the dreadful war was over and their father would soon be home. I asked her in which of the rebel armies her husband was serving, and she said, "Oh, with Lee, with Lee." The touching scene so impressed me that I took the trouble to inquire afterward about the father, only to learn that he had been killed in one of the last battles about Richmond. Her expressions of gratitude at the news of the close of the war hardly died on the ear, until it gave way to the grief and despair of a home desolated by the ravages of war, and robbed of a husband's and father's care and love. And here, having galloped for over an hour, through eight miles of marching troops, I reached the end of my ride, repeating my message for the last time to old companions, and closing the exciting incident, watching with fresh interest the same wild demonstrations I had seen repeated in every regiment of the corps. But as soon as the reaction from the great strain under which I had made the ride came, both horse and rider needed the kind help which willing hands offered. I found myself so hoarse that for days I could not speak above a whisper. My horse, now covered with foam and dust, no longer spurred by the wild shouts that had filled his ears through the excitement of his long gallop, was quickly surrounded by an admiring throng, all

anxious to give him the grooming he had so richly earned.

After a little rest I started to slowly retrace my steps toward headquarters, which I did not reach until late in the day. The ride through the corps, though free from the excitement of the one in the morning was full of interest, and coupled with incidents always to be recalled with the greatest pleasure. The feeling that was uppermost in the thoughts of all, was that the war was over. All restraint and discipline were for the time abandoned. The strain of four long years of anxiety and suspense was suddenly thrown off, and the few hours of tumult and exultation that had intervened since I had brought them the most welcome news of their lives, had already given place to the more serious considerations of the returning responsibilities of their muster out, so unexpectedly confronting them. To the large majority of the people throughout the North the day was one of unalloyed joy and relief. The dark clouds of uncertainty that had enveloped their country and business had only to lift, and let the sunlight fall upon their homes, without a vacant chair. While they had shared in the general anxiety for the preservation of the government and the risks that made every business venture during that period attended with unusual care, they could now feel the new impulse, which restored confidence and rapidly returning prosperity sent into every channel of trade. There had been no break in their family circles, no disarrangement in business relations, and now in the glad day of peace there were no uncertainties for them. But all through the ranks about me, in the midst of the most unrestrained revelry, I could catch enough of their conversation to know that

already these men were anxiously discussing the chances that awaited them when they returned to the duties of civil life. There were young men among them who had left their schools and colleges, who were now too old to return to them to finish their education. The day was therefore at hand for them, when their life work was to be chosen. There were men of years and families, who had hastily left valuable situations. Others had taken their places, and the chances of their returning to such positions were being discussed. There were men who had left important business interests which others had taken during their absence, and the probabilities of new ventures were to be considered. They had gone out from their peaceful pursuits untrained to the duties of the soldier and unaccustomed to the dangers and privations of army life. They had passed through the perils of battles, the hardships of marches, the exposures of the camp, and had in their respective spheres contributed to the great triumphs of the mightiest volunteer armies ever organized. Some of them, rising to the full measure of the opportunities presented them, had demonstrated the wonderful capabilities of the American citizen soldier, and were sure to return to their homes to receive the highest honors and rewards a grateful people could bestow. And so, slowly retracing my steps amid these happy and buoyant men, I learned of their anxieties and expectations for the future. I had been with most of their regiments from the earlier days of their organization, and knew the story of their service. I knew they were the same men whose voices I had heard filling the pine forests of Georgia with hurrahs, when Hood's army stole out from Atlanta and left it a dismantled fortress in Septem-

ber, 1864. They had followed Johnston and Hood from Chattanooga; furrowed Northern Georgia with one hundred and seventy-five miles of trenches and earthworks, and left a fortified camp to mark every night's tenting place from May to September. They had measured bayonets with the best Confederate army ever marshaled in the West, at Resaca, New Hope Church, Utoy Creek, and all the struggles for the possession of Atlanta. These were the men whom Sherman had left to guard Tennessee and Kentucky from raids, while Hood was to follow him to the sea. They were the men, however, upon whom it devolved to fight that desperate army, which, instead of trailing after Sherman as he marched through Georgia, turned the head of its columns toward the Ohio, and with resolute valor and rapid marches was thundering with its batteries in the heart of Tennessee before Sherman had tramped half way to Savannah. These were the men who, with the unbridged Harpeth River behind them, and Hood's picked regiments in far superior numbers before them, stood with such heroism to their guns, as to pile up in the bloody trenches before them, in proportion to the troops involved, more dead and wounded men than fell in any other single conflict in the war, and made the battle of Franklin, for the numbers engaged and the issues at stake, one of the bloodiest and most decisive victories of the war. It was, when looking down from higher ground upon their thin lines, just before the battle, that Hood said to General Cleburn and his other division commanders, "We have but to drive that half-whipped army into the river, and our march to the Ohio will be rapid and easy." The desperate resistance at Franklin, and the glorious victory

at Nashville, prevented Hood from marching to the gates of Cincinnati, and made the great results of the March to the Sea possible. And having thus, with their comrades of co-operating armies, saved Indiana and Ohio from a rebel invasion in the fourth year of the war, and driven Hood's army, broken and dismembered, south of the Tennessee, they had come to help open the Atlantic ports, and were now marching in high glee toward Raleigh to share in the glory of the final surrender.

To this gallant little army, and to men of such illustrious services, I had carried the greatest news of all the war. Their ringing shouts for deliverance from the perils of the field still sound like sweet music in my ears; and the radiant faces of strong men, wearied with the strain of hopes deferred, who saw suddenly unfolding to their brightening vision the scenes of a speedy reunion with loved ones at home, is a picture I shall carry in memory long as life shall last, and make forever precious to me, the recollections of how I carried the news of Lee's surrender to the Army of the Ohio.





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